



It's A Wonderful Life Bible Study

Gethsemane Lutheran Church
11/18/2020

Welcome

Trivia

- 1) What are the names of George and Mary's 4 children, from oldest to youngest?
- 2) It's A Wonderful Life won one Academy Award (i.e. Oscar). In what category?
- 3) Mary's date at the graduation party is played by Carl Switzer. Carl Switzer is better known for what role?



Trivia

- 4) What is the contraption in Mr. Gower's drugstore that George uses to make wishes?
- 5) Who calls George the following nicknames?
- George Porgie
 - George "Geographic Explorer" Bailey
 - Ol' Mossback George
 - George Bailey-offski
 - Slacker George





Session 2: In a Dark Place

- The George Bailey we discussed in depth last week was a man of character. Time and again, he placed the needs of others above himself.
- He's just the kind of person we would hope all would go well for. But one absent-minded blunder by Uncle Billy sends George into the darkest moment of his life.
 - What was that blunder?
 - What would happen if that \$8,000 cannot be found? What are the implications for George?

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- Scene 1: “I’m at the end of my rope...”

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- For nearly his whole life, George has been the one others looked to for help.
- But this time, George is out of options. He sees no way to work through this issue, which threatens to bring George's entire life to ruin.





Session 2: In a Dark Place

- Did Jimmy Stewart's acting feel powerfully authentic in this scene?
- This was Stewart's first film role after serving in WWII as a squadron commander and an active bomber pilot, flying 20 combat missions over enemy territory.
- Stewart described in an interview some of the emotion he felt during the war:
 - *[Stewart recalled]... "A time when we were pushing really hard and morale was getting kinda low. We were flying one raid after another. One night I got really afraid of what the dawn might bring. Our group had suffered a number of casualties during that (preceeding) day. A lot of time when we flew, I'd lose men from other aircraft in my group. All I wanted to do was keep them alive and do our job. For some reason...I don't know why...I felt like I might not be able to do it this time. At dawn I was going to lead the men of my command deep into Germany, and I found myself imagining the worst. I'd seen men frozen by fear. Fear is deadly in those circumstances. It's insidious. Fear breeds bad judgment. It's like a disease...it's contagious. I knew I was putting my whole crew in danger just by being afraid."*
- During the filming of *It's A Wonderful Life*, Stewart was certainly still trying to process his experiences during the war. Regarding the scene in Martini's bar, Stewart reports being overcome by real emotion:
 - *"In this scene, at the lowest point in George Bailey's life, Frank Capra was shooting a long shot of me slumped in despair. In agony I raise my eyes and, following the script, plead, "God... God...dear Father in heaven, I'm not a praying man, but if you're up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I'm at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God..." As I said those words, I felt the loneliness, the hopelessness of people who had nowhere to turn, and my eyes filled with tears. I broke down sobbing. This was not planned at all, but the power of that prayer, the realization that our Father in heaven is there to help the hopeless, had reduced me to tears."*

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt a hopelessness/despair similar to what George feels in this scene?
- What did you hold onto during those moments?
- What did George reach for when he saw no way through his situation?
 - “God...God...Dear Father in Heaven...I’m not a praying man but if you’re up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I’m at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God.”
- Is this prayer oozing with faith?
 - I’m not a praying man...
 - If you’re up there...
 - If you can hear me...
- Granted, it’s a movie, but...is God offended by this type of prayer?

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- *...for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." --Jesus, Matthew 17:20b*
- God desires our faith, certainly. But Jesus tells us that even a small amount of genuine faith has the power to move a mountain.
- George in his desperation is not bursting with faith, but he has enough faith to believe that only God can show him the way through his hopeless situation.

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- What did Jimmy Stewart hold onto to sustain him through the fears which threatened to overtake him during WWII?
- As Stewart prepared to depart for the front in England, his parents (Alexander and Bessie) visited him at his base in Sioux City, Iowa. At the time of their parting, Stewart's father handed him an envelope and asked him to read it once the plane was airborne. Stewart complied, and as the plane carried him toward the most daunting battle of his life, Stewart read these words:



Session 2: In a Dark Place

My dear Jim boy, soon after you read this letter, you will be on your way to the worst sort of danger. I have had this in mind for a long time and I am very much concerned.

But Jim, I am banking on the enclosed copy of the 91st Psalm. The thing that takes the place of fear and worry is the promise in these words. I am staking my faith in these words.

I feel sure that God will lead you through this mad experience. I can say no more. I continue only to pray. Goodbye my dear. God bless you and keep you. I love you more than I can tell you.

Dad

November 11, 1943

Session 2: In a Dark Place

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you say, "The LORD is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling,

no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- Remember the interview where Stewart described the paralyzing fear he felt during the war? He continued:
- *“Whenever I got like that, I went to chapel. In fact, I went to chapel regularly. I was brought up to have faith, but in war when you know that life can be suddenly shortened, you get to thinking about religion more. You hope there really is a hereafter. Those were the times I recounted the 91st Psalm. Sometimes there’d be a moment during a raid that would suddenly scare you—that’s what happens in dangerous situations. And I’d recite the 91st Psalm, and it somehow helped me forget my fear. I didn’t pray for my own life. I prayed that I wouldn’t make a mistake. My biggest fear was making a mistake that got my men killed.”*



Session 2: In a Dark Place

- But back to George Bailey...
- Did God answer George's prayer? Did he "show him the way"? How does God bring George out of his place of hopelessness and fear of what the future holds?



Session 2: In a Dark Place

- Scene 2: I want to live again!

Session 2: In a Dark Place

- Think about George's situation:
 - \$8,000 is missing from the Building and Loan's funds.
 - George has no idea where to get that kind of money.
 - The Building and Loan is likely to go bankrupt.
 - George's reputation will be ruined.
 - Prison appears imminent.
 - His four young children are in danger of growing up without a father.
 - How can Mary support the children in the wake of all this?
- These facts had led George to such a bleak desperation that he contemplated taking his own life.
- Now ask yourself: At the moment George decides he wants to live again...while he's running down the street wishing a Merry Christmas to the Emporium, the Movie Theatre, the Building and Loan, Mr. Potter, etc...what facts of George's situation have changed (at least to the extent he is aware)?

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- If the facts of George's situation haven't changed, what has changed?
 - His perspective
 - His appreciation for the gift of life
 - His appreciation for the other gifts which God has given him (his wife, his children, friends and family)
- George wasn't filled with joy because the town had rallied to raise funds and solve his issue (George didn't know that yet). His hopelessness and fear had been replaced with joy because he realized that he truly had a wonderful life already. God's hand had been upon George his whole life, and surely God would make a way through this. As Psalm 91 says...*"Because he loves me, I will rescue him. I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name."*

Closing Thoughts/Comments

